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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: SMALL CLASH BETWEEN BHUTANESE REFUGEES AND
LOCALS RAISES CONCERNS

1. (SBU) According to press reports, UNHCR staff and refugees, a fight between two Bhutanese refugees and three locals has led to the reimplementation of camp procedures requiring all refugees to request passes before leaving the refugee camps. On 29 July, two Bhutanese refugees from the Beldangi II camp, who were cutting firewood without permission near the camp, were approached by the Chairman and two staff of the local community forest users group (CFUG). The CFUG members were wearing khukuri knives while patrolling the forest; the refugees, allegedly afraid of being harmed by the CFUG members, attacked the CFUG members, and beat up the Chairman.

2. (SBU) As a result, on 31 July the Chief District Officer/Director of the GON Refugee Coordination Unit, CFUG members, refugees, Camp Supervisors, UNHCR and other interested parties met to resolve the conflict. The participants decided to strictly implement the "out pass" system at the camp. (NOTE: Many refugees, particularly at the Beldangi camps, leave the camps each day to work locally. Until now, they had not requested or needed passes for this purpose, even though the policy had been on the books. END NOTE.)

3. (SBU) COMMENT: Stricter implementation of the camp rules appears necessary, if only to minimize tensions with the locals. However, any restrictions on free movement, even if only bureaucratic, is likely to be felt as a "considerable hardship," as one refugee commented. Whether a hardship in reality or not, such perceptions increase refugee frustration with their uncertain circumstances. Rumors of fencing off the camps, though apparently baseless, also have raised refugee anxiety levels. END COMMENT.
MORIARTY